Press release

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Olympic clouds could have a silver lining for UK weather experts

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A British team working at the Olympics in Australia could be going for gold. They've been invited to take their latest severe weather expertise to the games in Sydney.

The Met. Office is sending its experts to Sydney to test out new technology for forecasting thunderstorms. They'll be working alongside other countries, invited by the World Met Organisation, to see which of the different systems is best at predicting the unpredictable weather for the games.

The British system, called GANDOLF, (Generating Advanced Nowcasts for Deployment in Operational Land-surface Flood Forecasting) was developed three years ago in partnership with the Environment Agency. It's been on trial for the past two summers in the Thames region.

GANDOLF is a computer model that uses radar, satellite and The Met. Office model data to predict the development and decay of heavy showers. The erratic Sydney climate will provide the perfect test for the system which has been designed to predict short but intense thunderstorms.

Stewart Wass, Head of Government Business at the The Met. Office says: "We hope to show how well it works and that it is a reliable system for forecasting these types of thunderstorms. I think it's very brave science, by that I mean it's leading edge, it's a bold way of cracking a very difficult problem. It may not be a competition but we hope our system is the best - we are going for gold!"

At home GANDOLF will help improve the Severe Weather Warning Service. The Environment Agency will be able to use it to predict heavy rainfall, especially in urban areas where short intense storms can cause flooding very quickly. It can also be used to help water companies anticipate and control sudden heavy rainfall to help prevent overflows at waste water treatment plants.

Until the advent of GANDOLF it has been difficult to detect and forecast small, shortlived, but incredibly intensive thunderstorms. Following the successful trials this year The Met. Office hopes to win at the Olympics and take GANDOLF worldwide.

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